



ROCKY MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

History of Political and Social Thought
“The Social Contract: From *The Republic* to Rawls”
Course Syllabus
Fall 2013

POL 321
TTh 1:00-2:15
Tech Hall 14

Professor: Dr. O’Gara
Office: Morledge-Kimball 214
Office Hours: TTh 12:00-1:00, and *all day*
MWF (by appointment)
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Course Description:

Thematically, this seminar will primarily focus primarily on the relationship between man and the state: that is, if we consider the notion that the state is an inherently coercive set of institutions, we must concomitantly address the citizen’s ability and willingness to submit to and legitimize state power by granting consent to the government. We will reflect on the concepts of rights, duties, law, and justice – all basic components of what is referred to as “The Social Contract” – with an emphasis on these concepts as the foundation of Western civilization.

After a brief introduction to the (sometimes contested) argument that ancient Greece is the bedrock of Western intellectual and political thought, we will read canonical works from 15 major theorists, grouped roughly by the themes of ancient philosophy, modern philosophy, and the conflict among libertarians, statist/nationalists, and communists.

Students should be advised that we will treat these “great works” not as historical records but rather as enduring intellectual ideals that can be analyzed and understood in relation to modern society and our own individual experiences. However, this is not a course in current events; course discussions will require significant historical depth and theoretical nuance and will not consist of competing polemics. The course will be run as a true (discussion-based) seminar, in which students are expected to develop their analytical skills and ability to critically evaluate detailed materials and to comprehend competing and highly complex ideas.

Required Texts:

Steven Cahn, *Classics of Political and Moral Philosophy*
Plato, *Crito* (Benjamin Jowett translation)

Supplemental readings will be handed out in class or can be obtained online.

Course Policies:

The first requirement of each student is to understand that this is an academic environment and as such it is necessary that there is a high degree of civility, respect for fellow students, and respect for the material. You are expected to do *all* assigned readings, and you must participate in class if you hope to earn a passing grade.

1. Missed Classes: This course covers a great deal of material and meets just twice a week; therefore repeated absences will not be tolerated. Students are allowed three absences, regardless of circumstance. Subsequent absences will result in your course grade being rescaled down by 1/3; i.e. a student with six absences will have their final grade reduced 1 point on a 4.0 scale.
2. Missed Assignments: If you do not turn in a graded assignment your maximum grade in the course will be rescaled along a 90/80/70/60 scale; i.e. if you fail to hand in a paper worth 20 percent of your grade, your highest possible grade in the class will be a B, regardless of your average on a 4-point scale.
3. Late Papers: Papers will lose one full letter grade per class session late. No exceptions.
4. Plagiarism and Cheating: Neither will be tolerated, and if a student is caught doing either they will fail the course and I will recommend to the Dean of Students that said student be expelled from school.
5. Electronic Devices: the use of any electronic device is strictly prohibited in this course. This includes e-readers, as I will not participate in the demise of the written word. Cell phone usage is also prohibited; a student who is seen using their cell phone for any reason will receive an F as their final grade in the course.
6. Email: I check my email daily but I prefer not to use it as a means of conversation. Email should be used only for quick, non-emergency questions and for setting up appointments for face-to-face meetings in my office. Informal emails will be ignored and discarded. Also, for institutional as well as technological reasons, only communicate with me via your official @rocky.edu account.

Assessment Outcomes:

The following History & Political Science major assessment criteria are advanced in this course:

1. Analyze, interpret, and critically evaluate major political issues and/or historical events;
2. Demonstrate familiarity with the major theories and thinkers in the field;
6. Understand the difference between opinions and substantiated scholarly claims;
7. Effectively utilize and appropriately cite academic sources;
8. Write papers essentially free of errors in grammar, mechanics, and spelling.

OPI/PEPPS Standards and Learning Outcomes:

Standard 10.58.523, Social Studies

5(a): the nature of individual dignity, human rights, (popular) sovereignty, political power, citizenship, and political authority;

5(f): the nature of international relations and the principles and organizations that are used to mediate multinational conflict and achieve multinational order.

Graded Assignments:

Foundational Paper:

For the second day of class you are required to write a 2 page paper on the definition, nature, and logic of Social Contract Theory, including an explanation of the state of nature, natural rights and positive law, and the appropriate and/or legitimate role of the state. These papers will provide us with a lens through which we can analyze and interpret the various authors that we will read throughout the semester.

Papers may be based entirely on internet sources, and they must be composed in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double spaced, with normal one-inch margins. Papers will lose 1/3 of a grade if they exceed the stated limits, are not paginated properly, or are not stapled. Late papers will lose one full grade per day late.

Short Papers:

Each student is responsible for writing three, 5-7 page papers, which will juxtapose the various viewpoints of each author, and which will be grouped thematically as follows:

- (1) Social Contract Theory in the Ancient world (Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, Aquinas);
- (2) Social Contract Theory in the Modern world (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hume);
- (3) The continuing debate over the role of the state (Smith, Marx, Hegel, Mill, Nozick, Rawls).

For each assignment you will be given a handout with specific guidelines that will help you direct your essays, but in general these will be review essays which directly confront each author's position on the social contract and the appropriate role of the state and citizen/subject. In addition, we will have a roundtable discussion on the day each paper is due, with a specific focus on how the ideas presented relate to one another and represent either the evolution or devolution of political and social theory.

Note: papers should be composed in 12 pt. Times New Roman font, double spaced, with normal one-inch margins. Papers will lose 1/3 of a grade if they exceed the stated limits, are not paginated properly, or are not stapled. Late papers will lose one full grade per day late.

Grading:

Papers will be graded on an A-F scale and will be averaged as follows:

Foundational Paper:	5 percent
Short Papers:	25 percent each
Participation:	20 percent

Grading Criteria:

These are the standards I adhere to when I grade essays. Pluses and minuses represent shades of difference, as do split grades (e.g. B-/C+). Grades are based on the evidence of the essay submitted, not on effort or time spent.

A

Excellent in every way (this is not the same as perfect). This is an ambitious, perceptive essay that grapples with interesting, complex ideas; responds discerningly to counter-arguments; and explores well-chosen evidence revealingly. The analysis enhances, rather than underscores, the reader's and writer's knowledge (it doesn't simply repeat what has been taught). There is a context for all the ideas; someone outside the class would be enriched, not confused, by reading the essay. Its introduction opens up, rather than flatly announces, its thesis. Its conclusion is something more than a summary. The language is clean, precise, often elegant. The reader should feel enlightened and educated for having read the paper. There's something new in your analysis, something perhaps only you could have written and explored, in this particular way. The writer's stake in the material is obvious.

B

A piece of writing that reaches high and achieves many of its aims. The ideas are solid and progressively explored but some thin patches require more analysis and/or some stray thoughts don't fit in. The language is generally clear and precise but occasionally not. The evidence is relevant, but there may be too little; the context for the evidence may not be sufficiently explored, so that I have to make some of the connections that the writer should have made clear for me. This is a solid essay whose reasoning and argument may nonetheless be rather routine (the limitation is largely conceptual).

C

A piece of writing that has real problems in one of these areas: conception (there's at least one main idea but it is fuzzy and difficult to understand); structure (non-linear development of your ideas); use of textual evidence (weak or non-existent -- the connections among the ideas and the evidence are not made and/or are presented without context, or are simple platitudes and generalizations); language (the sentences are often awkward, dependent on unexplained abstractions, sometimes contradict each other). The essay may not move forward but rather may repeat its main points, or it may touch upon many (and apparently unrelated) ideas without exploring any of them in sufficient depth and without a developmental flow. Punctuation, spelling, grammar, paragraphing, and transitions may be a problem.

- or- an essay that is largely plot summary or "interpretive summary" of the text, but is written without major problems.
- or- an essay that is chiefly a personal reaction to something. Well-written, but scant intellectual content
- mostly opinion.

D and F

These are efforts that are wildly shorter than they ought to be to grapple seriously with ideas.

- or- those that are extremely problematic in many of the areas mentioned above: aims, structure, use of evidence, language, etc.;
- or- those that do not come close to addressing the expectations of the essay assignment.

Participation:

The majority of class time will be devoted to discussion of the assigned readings. Discussion can include (but is not limited to) an analysis and/or critique of the author's position, a comparison of the assigned work to another text, or debate as to the meaning or merit of a given work (or particular points therein).

Class participation is evaluated on quality rather than quantity. Comments need not mirror the position of the author (or the professor). You are graded not on the "correctness" of your position, but rather on your analysis of the material and your ability to articulate your ideas. You don't have to be at the center of every debate, but students who make little or no effort to enter discussions will receive a lower participation grade. Discussion will become lively, heated even. Always respect the positions of others. When you disagree with someone, be sure to criticize the *idea* and not the person.

Participation will be graded according to the following criteria:

A

The student in this grade range arrives in class each day thoroughly prepared with comments and questions on the assigned reading. Comments reveal that the student has read carefully; this student occasionally initiates the discussion without waiting for the professor to do so. This student does not, however, try to dominate the class, but listens carefully to the remarks made by fellow class members, and responds as readily to these as to the instructor's questions.

B

The student in this grade range participates in most discussions, although not as fully or reliably as the student described above. There is evidence of having done the reading. This student pays attention to the comments of the other students.

C

The student in this grade range participates only intermittently, and is more willing to discuss broad, general questions than to engage in concrete analysis of an assigned text. Sometimes unprepared, this student lacks interest in the ideas of other members of the class, neglects to bring the proper text to class, and is often inattentive.

D or F

The student in this grade range seldom if ever participates.

Things that lower your participation grade:

- * Not paying attention in class
- * A ringing cellphone
- * Talking to your neighbor or holding conversations separate from the class discussion
- * A student who is seen using their phone for text messaging will receive an F as their final participation grade

NOTE: Unlike paper grades, participation will *not* be given plus/minus or split grades, and your final grade is weighted in a manner such as to make it impossible for you to receive an A for the course if your participation grade is not an A.

Semester Schedule:

Week 1:

8/27

Introduction and Course Outline

8/29

Plato, *Crito* (handout)

Foundational Paper on Social Contract Theory Due

Week 2:

9/3

Plato, *The Republic*, in Cahn (pp. 59-85)

9/5

Plato, *The Republic*, in Cahn (pp. 108-133)

Week 3:

9/10

Aristotle, *Politics*, in Cahn (pp. 213-240)

9/12

Aristotle, *Politics*, in Curtis (pp. 250-262)

Week 4:

9/17

Cicero, *On the Republic* and *On the Laws*, in Cahn

9/19

Augustine, *The City of God*, in Curtis

Week 5:

9/24

Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, in Cahn

9/26

Roundtable / Review / Paper Prompt

Week 6:

10/1

PAPER ONE DUE

10/3

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, in Cahn (pp. 375-405)
“The Crisis of Modernity,” handout

Week 7:

10/8

Hobbes, *Leviathan*, in Cahn (pp. 405-430)

10/10

Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, in Cahn (pp. 451-484)

Week 8:

10/15

Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, in Cahn (pp. 484-516)

10/17

Midterm Break

Week 9:

10/22

Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, in Cahn

10/24

Rousseau, *Of the Social Contract*, in Cahn

Week 10:

10/29

Hume, *Of the Original Contract*, in Cahn

10/31

Roundtable / Review / Paper Prompt

Week 11:

11/5

PAPER TWO DUE

11/7

Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in Cahn

Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, in Cahn (pp. 662-670)

Week 12:

11/12

Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, in Cahn

11/14

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, in Cahn (pp. 958-965)

Week 13:

11/19

Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, in Cahn

11/21

Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, in Cahn

Week 14:

11/26

Roundtable / Review / Paper Prompt

11/28

Thanksgiving

Week 15:

12/3

PAPER THREE DUE

12/5

Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, in Cahn

Dewey, *Democracy*, in Cahn

12/9-12-13

FINAL EXAM WEEK